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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 002055

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SUBJECT: CODEL SCHIFF MEETS NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SPEAKER MIRZA

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: Codel Schiff -- U.S. Representatives Adam Schiff (D-CA) and Allyson Schwartz (D-PA) -- met May 26 with Pakistan National Assembly Speaker Dr. Fehmida Mirza. She promised the new GOP would remain tough in the fight against terrorism, but requested that the USG focus more resources on the socio-economic underpinnings of the issue. She welcomed the Congressional members as part of the House Democracy Assistance Commission and requested assistance in setting up a research center for her parliamentarians and televising National Assembly sessions. She committed to build the capacity of her institution and its members. End summary.

"We understand your concerns."

12. (SBU) Under the auspices of the House Democracy Assistance Commission, Codel Schiff spent much of its first morning, May 26, in Islamabad at Pakistan's National Assembly. Meeting National Assembly Speaker Dr. Fehmida Mirza and touring the Assembly hall, Codel Schiff conveyed the regards of our own House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and offered ideas for parliamentary exchanges and Congressional assistance to fellow legislative bodies with research and staff issues.

13. (C) Accompanied by Deputy Speaker Faisal Karim Kundi, Mirza began the meeting by thanking the USG for its support of free and fair elections on February 18 and continued assistance through Pakistan's democratic transition. She said that, unlike the previous National Assembly under Musharraf's Pakistan Muslim League (PML), the opposition was encouraged to appoint its parliamentary leader immediately. She added that 46 standing committees had been created, and opposition National Assembly members would likely be appointed to chair some of these committees.

14. (C) Saying, "We understand your concerns," Mirza encouraged the USG to fight the root cause of terrorism - poverty. Mirza encouraged Congress to act on U.S. legislation creating reconstruction opportunity zones (ROZs) in Pakistan's frontier areas. She reiterated that her party, Pakistan People's Party, was a progressive, national force. The PPP had been a victim of terrorism, losing its leader Benazir Bhutto. She was certain the PPP-led government would be strong against terrorists, and she predicted the new GOP would support increased socio-economic development in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

15. (C) Mirza warned that there was public resentment of the USG for "working with just one man." People needed to see

more social welfare projects, which would affect their everyday lives, she argued, or they would become discouraged. The new GOP had this responsibility, but the USG could help. And though the papers focused on restoration of the pre-November 3 judiciary -- an important issue that would be resolved, she added -- most Pakistanis were more concerned over the rising price of basic food staples.

In-House Initiatives

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¶6. (SBU) Mirza acknowledged that Pakistan was still an emerging democracy. She welcomed the Congressional members of the Commission and asked for help with broadcasting equipment to televise National Assembly sessions and committee meetings. Pakistan's Senate already had this capability, she said, believing that the presence of television cameras in the chamber would increase members' participation and provide active oversight of the judiciary.

¶7. (SBU) She thanked Embassy's USAID for help in building a research center for parliamentarians. She promised to finalize issues related to the land deed soon after the budget was decided, o/a June 30. She hoped the center would build the capacity of her institution and its members.

¶8. (SBU) Mirza also hoped to revitalize the women's caucus in the lower house which she leads. She said that the 15 directly elected women and the 60 other women filling reserved seats were an "outspoken group." They had asked most of the questions during the Prime Minister's question hour, focusing on education and health issues especially.

ISLAMABAD 00002055 002 OF 002

Mirza said she would push for a "gender budget," i.e., spending on just such socio-economic issues.

¶9. (U) Mirza said she looked forward to visiting the U.S. in her official capacity after the budget debate this June; she did not, however, set a date. She expressed her interest in meeting her counterpart, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and in visiting the Congressional Research Service (CRS). (Note: PPP leader Asif Zardari, separately, also encouraged this visit when he met Codel Schiff. Embassy has proposed that all 15 directly elected parliamentarians visit the U.S. as part of a special international visitors program.)

¶10. (U) Codel Schiff did not clear this cable.

PATTERSON